

13. SIGNS OF HIS SECOND COMING

TWO FRIENDS and I were driving about ninety miles south from Delhi, India, to view the famous Taj Mahal on the outskirts of Agra. According to our map, the road which we were to follow would cross certain rivers and pass towns and villages, all named on the map. One by one we passed them. Like signposts along the way, they pointed to Agra and the Taj Mahal. We were sure we must be drawing near that world famous monument to a broken heart, for we had crossed the Jumna River and were passing through Agra. There was the great red fort, which we visited briefly. Soon every one of the signs was passed. Surely we would see the Taj when we turned the next corner. Sure enough, there it was, like a white cloud on the horizon; the beautiful dream of Shah-Jahan, the final witness to his love for his wife, the beautiful Mumtaz Mahal, materialized forever in white marble by the labor of twenty thousand men for twenty years.

The road signs led us all the way from Delhi to the marble dream. Even so the road of time from Christ's day to ours, and beyond to His second coming, is marked with signs. Jesus said, "There shall be signs." Luke 21:25. We should remember that when our Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth, He claimed a knowledge of the future. As the Son of God, He knew what was to come.

Our belief as to whether Christ is coming the second time or not depends upon what we think of Him. Who is He? If Christ is the divine Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, then His promise to come again has the authority of divinity. He declared that He was coming again and told the reason for His coming, even explaining how He would come. And, knowing all things, He also gave signs by which men might know when His appearing is near. He did not reveal the day and hour of His coming, but declared this knowledge was kept in the Father's power. (Matthew 24:36.) However, He told His people to watch, and He gave evidences of the nearness of His coming, for which all believers were to watch. He said: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh: so likewise you, when you shall see all these things, know that it [he, margin] is near, even at the doors." Matthew 24:32, 33. The visits of the Son of God are of such supreme importance to mankind that in no case are they carried out in secret.

The prophecies of the Old Testament told men that His first coming was near. So also does the Old Testament as well as the New warn men of His second coming. Before His first advent to this earth He had, through His prophets, declared the very year in which He would be baptized and begin His ministry, after being anointed by the Holy Spirit. The exact time of His crucifixion was also revealed. Had God's people in those times believed the Holy Scriptures and profited by these divine announcements, they would have been expecting His Son and would have been prepared to receive Him. When John, the cousin of Jesus, began to preach in the wilderness of Judea, he announced with great earnestness: "Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:1 He knew that the hour had struck for Christ to appear. And when our Savior Himself was baptized of John in Jordan, He immediately began to preach: "The time is fulfilled.... repent you, and believe the gospel." Mark 1: 15.

A small minority were watching for the fulfillment of the prophecies and were prepared to receive Him, but not so with the great masses. They were not watching, they were not waiting, and they did not receive Him.

So it will be in the latter days, when our Savior comes the second time. The Scripture declares that this great event will take place as a snare and as a thief in the night. It will be an overwhelming surprise to all the nations of the earth. But there will be some who will not be surprised, some who will be ready, some who will be watching for the signs of the times. Yes, Jesus said, "There shall be signs." just as surely as when the fig tree and all the trees put forth their leaves in the spring, we know that summer is coming-in fact, is beginning -just so surely, when we see the events take place which Jesus Himself predicted, we will know that His coming is drawing near, that a wonderful change is coming in the affairs of earth, that an invasion is about to take place which will change the world for good in all the ages to come.

All through the Word of God there are predictions by the prophets and apostles concerning conditions in the world and concerning its various activities at the time of the ending of this age. Those conditions are in the world today and betoken the end of time and the beginning of eternity. The fulfillment of divine prophecies found in both the Old and the New Testament give reason to expect the coming of our long-absent Lord.

However, let it be said again that no man knows the day or hour of His coming. We cannot overemphasize that fact. No one has been authorized to announce the definite time of Christ's coming.

Jesus made this clear when He said, "But of that day and hour knows no man." Matthew 24:36. It is not a matter of human wisdom or cleverness to figure out. The time of the coming of Christ depends upon God's will and also upon the ripening of the harvest of evil and of good. None of us could know what constitutes the ripeness of the eternal harvest, for the Lord "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9.)

But there are certain signs that are clearly stated in the Word of God as evidences of Christ's second coming. Among them are abounding wickedness; coldness and lukewarmness in Christian faith; a formal, lifeless church; a terrible departure from the faith of apostolic times; worldwide fear of war and vast preparations for it, along with worldwide proclamations of peace and the creation of human organizations to secure peace; unparalleled development of human knowledge and science; and the mighty advance of the gospel to all the world. These are only some of the signs of Christ's coming.

That these conditions prevail today is evident to all. One does not need to be a visionary, an enthusiast, a dreamer, or even a pessimist to see them. The facts are apparent to everyone. When the Sadducees and Pharisees came to Jesus, tempting Him and demanding that He show them a sign from heaven, He said: "When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky; but can you not discern the signs of the times?" Matthew 16:2, 3. God desires that we should recognize the signs of the times.

He has given other signs for the present generation of men, too. The entire twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew is a great sermon on eschatology, or last things. Two other parallel accounts with added details are found in Mark 13 and Luke 21. The first few verses of Matthew 24 deal largely with the signs that were to precede the destruction of the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. All those events took place literally, as we know from history, and are a symbol of the final destruction of this world.

Let us now note how Jesus blends His description of two great crises: (1) the destruction of the Jewish nation and the fall of Jerusalem, and (2) His second coming and the destruction of civilization as we know it. As Jesus was leaving the temple for the last time, some of His disciples spoke to Him of the beauty of the buildings of the temple and of its glory. Then He prophesied that it would be demolished, the city destroyed, and its people scattered over all the world. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you All these things shall come upon this generation." Matthew 23:36. The generation which rejected Jesus was responsible in a special way for the destruction of the city of God and the dispersion of the people of Israel. Notice especially the words "these things" and "this generation." "These things" refers to the punishment for all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from Abel to the prophet Zacharias. Jesus said that the punishment would come upon "this generation," the generation that heard Him utter these words, and His prophecy received a literal fulfillment.

As the disciples went with Christ to the Mount Of Olives, they asked Him, "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:3. In answer to their first question, "When shall these things be?" He gave the signs that would be fulfilled preceding the fall of Jerusalem. The Roman armies were to come and surround the city-this was to be a sign for the Christians to flee to the mountains. "When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." Luke 21:20-22.

When the crisis hour came to the city once chosen of God, those who believed what Christ had said escaped from the doomed city. On this point it is interesting to note that when Cestius surrounded Jerusalem with the Roman army and was about to take it, apparently unaware of the fact that the city was about to surrender, he suddenly withdrew and retreated toward the coast. The defending forces followed him and, with others gathered from the countryside, almost destroyed his army in the mountain passes. Some say it was the greatest destruction of a Roman army with the exception of that of the legions of Varus in the Teutoburg Forest of Germany. It was a great hour of victory for the Jewish defenders of Jerusalem.

At this very time of jubilation the followers of Christ fled from the city "like rats from a sinking ship," as one writer put it. Why did they flee when all was going well and when it seemed that the Roman armies would never be able to take the city? They had the command of Christ, and that was enough for them. Remember, they did not flee in a time of defeat and desperation, but at a time of victory and hope. And they did this because Christ had given them the sign: "When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then ... flee." They crossed to the east side of the Jordan River at the little town of Pella and lived there for a number of years.

These events took place in AD. 66. In AD. 70 the Roman armies led by Vespasian and Titus, his son, returned, surrounded Jerusalem, and, after a terrible five month siege, captured it. The holy temple itself was seized and burned, contrary to Titus's orders.

According to Josephus, Titus declared that neither his armies nor his siege engines could ever have breached the walls of Jerusalem unless God Himself had helped them. The stubborn defense of the city aroused the anger of the besiegers, and they showed no mercy when they finally broke through the walls. The savagery of the slaughter at Jerusalem is probably the worst in the long history of Roman wars. Thousands of Jews were sold into slavery; other thousands were sent to various cities to die in the arenas. Titus reserved the tallest and most handsome of his captives for his triumphal return to Rome. It is said that 11,000 of his prisoners starved to death while he was classifying and dividing them. Josephus estimates that the Romans took 97,000 captives, and he calculates those who died in the siege to have reached the almost unbelievable figure of over 1,100,000. Most of these were visitors who were in Jerusalem for the Passover at the time the Roman army surrounded it. When the conqueror returned to Rome, a great arch was built near the forum, called to this day the Arch of Titus. On it one may see carvings of the trophies taken from Jerusalem, including the seven branched candlestick from the temple.

When Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the great temple which was the pride of the whole nation, the disciples could imagine this taking place only at the end of time, in the final cataclysm of the world. Our Savior did not separate the two events entirely, but mingled the description of one with the other. In blending His description of these two great crises-(1) the destruction of the Jewish nation and the fall of Jerusalem, and (2) His second coming and the destruction of civilization as we know it-the Savior made the future clear to those who open His Word. His entire discourse here was given not only for the disciples of that day but also of our day, those who will witness the last scenes of this world's history.

Turning to His disciples, Jesus said: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Matthew 24:4, 5. It is true that between His death and the siege of Jerusalem many false messiahs did appear. But this warning is also for us today. The same deceptions are still being practiced, for men are even now arising claiming to be mighty prophets or even Christ Himself. They are leading away hundreds of thousands of followers.

"And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Verse 6. Before the destruction of Jerusalem various nations struggled for supremacy one over the other. There was even trouble within the Roman Empire. Emperors were murdered and their murderers became in turn emperors. "All these things must come to pass," said Christ, "but the end [that is, of the Jewish people as a nation] is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." Verses 6-8.

Many who saw these events occurring in those days believed them to be judgments upon the nation for their affliction of the nation of Israel. But our Savior urged His followers not to be deceived. They were really the beginning of judgments upon His own people as well as upon the world. The signs which unbelieving Israel considered to be signs of their release from Roman bondage were really signs of their destruction. "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." Verses 9, 10.

This was all fulfilled. Christians suffered greatly in those times of persecution between AD. 31 and AD. 70. They were accused of being betrayers of their country. Children betrayed their parents; parents handed over their own children for execution. Friend delivered friend to the Sanhedrin. One of the most noted persecutors of this time was Saul, who later was converted and became Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles and writer of a large portion of the New Testament. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and James the apostle were put to death with great cruelty. In the latter times we may expect a recurrence of persecution, of laws to restrict religious liberty and to force the consciences of men.

But as it was in the times of ancient Israel, there will be a boundary over which men may not step, for God will say, "Thus far, and no farther." Persecution is a witness for Christ, and those who see it make decisions either for or against Him. We should remember that this warning which our Savior gave in His description of the destruction of Jerusalem was to be heeded forty years later. Likewise many of Christ's prophecies were to meet their application long centuries after He gave them. Only by a study of His Word can one tell exactly when they apply. Beginning with verse twenty-one of this twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, the signs foretold by Jesus point forward exclusively to the end of the world. Long centuries of

darkness, centuries marked with blood and tears and agony for His church, were to stand between the end of the Jewish nation and the end of the world. The disciples had asked: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Verse 3. Now the last part of their question was emphasized in our Savior's reply. He gave many signs, all of which have been fulfilled right up to the present day. Anyone may read them in the twenty fourth chapter of Matthew. We are not here, of course, giving a verse-by-verse exposition of this great chapter of prophecy. For such a complete study, we refer the reader to the following authoritative books: *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White; *God Speaks to Modern Man*, by Arthur E. Lickey; *Drama of the Ages*, by W. H. Branson.

From the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ passed on rapidly to the final event in the chain of earth's history, His own coming in majesty and glory. With few words He sketched the tribulation through which His church was to pass during the intervening centuries. Having referred to Daniel the prophet as revealing events taking place in connection with the times He was describing, Jesus pictured the great tribulation of the Dark Ages. In this connection it is well to remember that Daniel speaks of a great power, which during this time was to "wear out the saints of the most High." (Daniel 7:25.) Of this time Jesus said: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:21, 22.

The first tribulation of the church came from the persecution by the Jewish leaders. (Acts 4:1-3; 7:59, 60; 8:1A.) A little later the Gentiles also persecuted the Christians. (Acts 16:19-24.) Pagan persecutions no nor ever shall be. And except those occurred intermittently for over three hundred years. Then in AD. 538 the 1260 years of papal supremacy and persecution began, as we learn from the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. Unless God had intervened, the elect would have been destroyed. But changes came in the nations, and those days of persecution were shortened and did not reach to 1798.

The era of discovery and the great Reformation came to Europe, cutting short the persecution which had put multitudes to death for their faith. The Reformation throughout northern Europe put a stop to the unlimited ecclesiastical persecution. Although it is true that France shut out the great reform, rationalism, liberalism, and tolerance arose there and the power of intolerance was broken. In 1762 the torture to death of a Protestant in France so aroused public opinion, led by Voltaire, that the government paid the victim's family an indemnity. We are told that the last Huguenots condemned to the gallows as dissenters from the state religion were released from their ship prison in 1775. So the days of unrestrained persecution were shortened, even before the 1260 years of the prophecy had ended.

After describing these days of tribulation, the Dark Ages of tyranny and oppression, of political religion and ignorance, Jesus passes on to coming events. He says: "Then [that is, following the great tribulation] if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christ's, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before." Matthew 24:23-25.

It is said that, beginning with Bar Cocheba, up to the end of the seventeenth century, over twenty false messiahs had appeared at different times among the Jews. Since then, many false Christ's and false prophets have arisen among the Gentiles also. With our present rapid and efficient means of communication, false Christ's and teachers have been able to gather tremendous followings in a very short time. They have also secured the use of great financial resources. We are to remember that great claims—even the working of signs and wonders—are no evidence that a teacher is of God, for Jesus said that false Christ's and false prophets would arise showing great signs and wonders.

"Wherefore," He says, "if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Verses 26, 27. We surely need this warning today. Some false Christ's teach that He has come secretly, in the chamber of death or the spiritualistic seance. We are not to believe it. Neither will the true Christ come to some desert gathering. We are not to go to such places to meet Christ. Jesus described His second coming as a coming in glory, as the lightning shining across the entire heaven—a great, public event. "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be," He said. Our Savior's words leave no room for any secret rapture, or mystical coming, or private appearance, or any other false theory contrived by pious or over-zealous "prophets." When Jesus comes, He will be seen "coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 24:30.)

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days [or, as we read in Mark 13:24] in those days, after that tribulation shall the sun be darkened. . . . and the stars shall fall from heaven." Matthew 24:29. The sign of the darkening of the sun is mentioned many times in the Scripture. In Isaiah 13: 10 we read that "the

sun shall be darkened in his going forth," or in the morning. Joel 2:10; 3:15; Acts 2:20; and Revelation 6:12 -all mention the dark day as one of the signs of the times.

We note that, according to our Savior's words, this darkening of the sun was to take place immediately after the tribulation of those days. When the Dark Ages ended, modern times began, and the Reformation did its work. By 1750 practically all the intense religious intolerance was in the past, and immediately afterward certain signs began to appear. The first of these signs, the darkening of the sun, mentioned in three of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), occurred on May 19, 1780.

These signs in the heavens were to be introduced by an exceedingly great earthquake, as we read in Revelation 6:12: "There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood." This could have been none other than the great Lisbon earthquake, which occurred November 1, 1755.

Of the Lisbon earthquake, Prof. W. H. Hobbs, geologist, says in the book Earthquakes, pages 142, 143: "Among the earth movements which in historic times have affected the kingdom of Portugal, that of Nov. 1, 1755, takes first rank, as it does, also, in some respects among all recorded earthquakes...

In six minutes sixty thousand people perished." It affected nearly four million square miles of the earth's surface, surpassing anything of the kind in recorded history up to that date or, it may be, even to the present. It came in the midst of an age of rationalism and unbelief, but it did turn men's thoughts to God, as we read in The Life of Voltaire, by James Parton: "Half the world felt the convulsion. . . . For many weeks, as we see in the letters and memoirs of that time, people in distant parts of Europe went to bed in alarm, relieved in the morning to find that they had escaped the fate of Lisbon one night more." Another writer stated, "The earthquake had made all men thoughtful. They mistrusted their love of drama, and filled the churches instead."

Then followed the great Dark Day of May 19, 1780, in the exact and proper order as given in the Scriptures. A description of this great Dark Day can be found in any encyclopedia or standard work on astronomy. It was not an eclipse, because it occurred when the moon was full. Its exact cause is not known, but it has been attributed to various factors. But whether it is known or not is not the question. It came on time and was one of the evidences or signs of Christ's coming. It was accepted as such by hundreds of thousands who saw it. People felt an alarm, an awe; they felt that God was working, that this great, strange phenomenon meant something serious and solemn. The extent of this darkness was remarkable, covering the northern and eastern parts of the North American Continent and lasting about fourteen hours. Candles were lighted in the houses, birds sang their evening songs and disappeared, fowls retired to roost. The poet Whittier described it in his poem "Abraham Davenport";

'Twas on a May day of the far old year
Seventeen hundred eighty, that there fell
Over the bloom and sweet life of the spring,
Over the fresh earth and the heaven of noon,
A horror of great darkness. . . .
Birds ceased to sing, and all the barnyard fowls Roosted;
the cattle at the pasture bars
Lowed, and looked homeward;
bats on leathern wings Flitted abroad;
the sounds of labor died;
Men prayed, and women wept;
all ears grew sharp To hear the doom blast of the trumpet shatter
The black sky."

In the department explanatory of "Noted Names," Webster's Unabridged Dictionary (edition 1883) says: "The Dark Day, May 19, 1780-so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. . . . The obscuration began about ten o'clock in the morning, and continued till the middle of the next night, but with difference of degree and duration in different places. . . . The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known."

President Timothy Dwight, of Yale College, tells of one of the historic incidents of that day. The legislature of Connecticut was in session. The House of Representatives had adjourned because of the

darkness and the fear that the day of judgment was at hand. It was proposed to adjourn the Council, the second legislative body of Connecticut. When Colonel Davenport was asked his opinion, he said: "I am against an adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought."

Whittier described this incident as follows:

"Meanwhile in the old Statehouse, dim as ghosts, Sat the lawgivers of Connecticut, Trembling beneath their legislative robes. 'It is the Lord's great day! Let us adjourn,' Some said; and then, as with one accord, All eyes were turned to Abraham Davenport. He rose, slow cleaving with his steady voice The intolerable hush. 'This well may be The day of judgment which the world awaits; But be it so or not, I only know My present duty, and my Lord's command To occupy till He come. So at the post Where He hath set me in His providence I choose, for one, to meet Him face to face. No faithless servant, frightened from my task, But ready when the Lord of the harvest calls; And therefore, with all reverence, I would say, Let God do His work, we will see to ours. Bring in the candles!'

So should all God's servants carry on His work until He comes.

Jesus said that after this great Dark Day sign, "the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Matthew 24:29. This same event is described in Revelation 6:13: "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." And so they did. Fifty-three years after the Dark Day, on the morning of November 13, 1833, there appeared the greatest star shower known in history.

Prof. Simon Newcomb, in his *Astronomy for Everybody*, page 280, compares this meteoric shower with others and says that it was the most remarkable one ever observed. It was seen over wide areas of the United States and other countries. The stars fell "even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." From one center in the sky near the constellation of Leo they flew out in every direction, one of the grandest sights that man has ever beheld. This phenomenon also was accepted by Christian people at the time as a sign from heaven.

Frederick A. Douglass, the liberated slave, wrote of the falling stars as follows: "I witnessed this gorgeous spectacle, and was struck with awe. The air seemed filled with bright descending messengers from the sky. It was about daybreak when I saw this sublime scene. It was not without the suggestion at that moment that it might be the harbinger of the coming of the Son of man; and in my state of mind I was prepared to hail Him as my friend and deliverer. I had read that the stars shall fall from heaven, and they were now falling. I was suffering much in my mind. . . . I was beginning to look away to heaven for the rest denied me on earth."--*My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 186.

Many people remembered the prophecy of Jesus and looked upon the falling of the stars as a harbinger of His second coming. Before discussing the Second Coming of Christ, which is the next great event in the heavens, I would draw your attention to other signs given by our Savior-events and conditions which will prevail in the world just before His second coming. He mentioned war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, distress of nations, and perplexity as signs of His coming. Then He says, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh." Luke 21:28.

Someone may say that such things have always occurred on earth since the world began, so how can they be signs? The answer is that these visitations in the latter days would be so unprecedented in their severity and number that they would constitute signs of Christ's Second Coming. The Apostle Peter foresaw this very objection, for he says in 2 Peter 3:3, 4: "There shall come in the last days scoffers.... saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Then he goes on to declare that in spite of the scoffing, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." Verse 10. Any apparent delay in His coming is explainable only because God is waiting to warn all peoples and endeavoring to win them to Him, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Verse 9.

As the signs appear all over the world, so all over the world the message is to be given: "Repent, turn to God, and prepare for the coming of Christ." It is easy to say that "all things continue as they were from the beginning," and the prophecy says that many will say that. But the fact is that conditions in the world are not continuing as they were. Take wars, for instance. There have always been wars in the world since the beginning of sin, but there had never been any such war as the first world war (1914-18). Sir

Winston Churchill said it was "different from all ancient wars, . . . and from all modern wars.... All the horrors of all the ages were brought together." In another book he said, "Henceforth whole populations will take part in war. Mankind has never been in this position before."

Then followed World War II. In it not only whole nations engaged in war, but whole nations were taken in captivity. Millions died of hunger, starvation, and forced labor, as well as from bombardment by land, sea, and air. Finally came the atomic bomb. War has taken on new dimensions. It is now worldwide - horrible!

There have been pestilences ever since sin entered the world, but following World War I came the greatest scourge ever known, the influenza epidemic of 1918-19. The Encyclopedia Britannica calls it "the crowning tragedy of so many tragic years." At least twenty million perished. It was indeed a pandemic with almost universal sway. The famine of 1922-23 was the great hunger time in Russia. Dr. Nansen, of Arctic fame, says that it took a toll of two or three million, and states that this famine was "beyond all doubt the most appalling in the recorded history of man." But there followed a worse famine in northwestern China, taking the heaviest toll ever known. More than twelve million people starved to death. D. O. Lively called it "the greatest human tragedy in the world's history."

Then there were to be "earthquakes, in divers places." (Matthew 24:7) Alonzo L. Baker, American journalist, reports on earthquakes, saying: "During the fifty years beginning with 1875 there were more severe earthquakes than in the 850 years preceding." The great quake in Kansu, China, in 1920, had no parallel as to the vast area affected. A hundred thousand people were buried in one night. "The mountains walked in the night," said the refugees. McClure's Magazine called it "the greatest single disaster since the Flood."

Truly all things do not continue as they were. The greatest wars, the greatest pestilences, the greatest famines, the greatest earthquakes-these have marked our day and generation, according to the reports of world observers. Satan is called "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air." Ephesians 2:2. He is the king of havoc, the lord of destruction. But the God of heaven is hastening the day when He will bring an end to the destructive power of evil and set His creation free. As the Apostle Paul puts it, "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.... waiting for redemption." Romans 8:22, 23.

Jesus Himself foretold these signs of the latter days, and He said: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh." Luke 21:28. That is the bright side of the picture. "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear. . . . And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Verses 25-27.

"Distress of nations, with perplexity"-distress and perplexity of mind-a perfect picture of our age and its thinking! No wonder hundreds of tons of soothing medicines are dispersed every year to the millions of troubled, worried people. It was the Prince of Wales who, some years ago in a speech made in the great Albert Hall, London, seemed to be commenting on this very sign that Jesus foretold, when he said: "We have before us today a world sick with fearful doubt.... a world of troubled nations.... It is an era of potential plenty, when confidence should be supreme, yet we see in almost every land widespread distress and perplexity."

But in the midst of all these signs everywhere we must not overlook the greatest of all signs, the most wonderful of all signs the giving of the gospel to all the world in this generation. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14. This is the reason for our modern inventions, the means of rapid communication and travel, printing, and worldwide education. Why have all these great inventions come in this age, and not another? It is that the gospel of the kingdom may be preached everywhere, quickly, "for a witness unto all nations." By word of mouth, by the printed page, by radio, by television, by faithful preachers around the world, the gospel is proclaimed.

This is the happiest, most glorious sign of all, and it should thrill our hearts. Let us not be among the last-day scoffers, who are themselves a sign. (2 Peter 3:3-7.) Every voice of skepticism, every denial of the Lord, is a last-day sign of His coming. Those who deny it, shutting their eyes to the evidence of Scripture and history and latter day events, are themselves living, walking, talking signs of His coming.

Are these things in the world today? Are the last-day scoffers here? Yes. Are the last-day preachers giving a message of gospel hope and peace to man? Yes. Will faith be a rare article on earth when Christ comes? Yes. "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. It is a

time when many will depart from the faith: "Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4: 1.

These events-the great earthquake, the darkened sun, the falling stars-took place in the exact order as foretold in Holy Writ. How infidels and unbelievers would have triumphed had these events come in reverse order, or in any other way than predicted! But they came exactly as outlined by the prophets and by our Lord Himself. History proved that God spoke the truth.

The next great event in the heavens is to be the coming of the Son of man in power and glory. "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matthew 24:3 1. Are we among His elect? Are we expecting Him? Are we waiting for His coming? Are we prepared for Him? "When you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Verses 33-35. In concluding His message in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, our Savior compared the conditions in the last days to those in the days of Noah just before the Flood. "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Verses 37-39.

Business will go on as usual. The occupations of life will continue. So will marriage and giving in marriage. The regular social life will continue. Then suddenly, all unexpectedly to most people, the great change will come, for which they are unprepared. Agricultural work will be going on, and women will be caring for the affairs of the home. The hour will come, the hour which has been predicted by prophets and declared by the Lord Jesus Christ as certain and sure. Yes, the hour will come; He will come! "Watch therefore," is our Lord's command; "for you know not what hour your Lord does come." "Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes." Verses 42, 44.

In Stockton, California, a minister preached an earnest sermon on the second coming of Christ. At the close, while he was praying, a woman arose and left the room. After he had finished the service, he went to the door to greet the people, and found this woman pacing back and forth in the lobby. The moment the minister appeared, she said: "How did you dare to pray as you did -'Come, Lord Jesus'? I don't want Him to come. It would break up all my plans. How dare you?" The minister said: "My dear friend, if you love the Lord, you will want Him to come. But He is coming whether you want Him to come or not. If you really know Him and love Him, you certainly will say in your heart, 'Come, Lord Jesus.'

BIBLE SUMMARY

Is the unparalleled increase of scientific knowledge that has taken place during the past two hundred years a sign of the times in which we live?

The answer is in Daniel 12:4: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

Note: Should we go back just 150 years, there would be no electric lights, no steamships, no diesel trains, no airplanes, no telephones, no phonographs, no radios, no television sets, no steel buildings, no linotypes. The world of George Washington was almost like the world of Abraham as far as travel, transportation, communication, and other commodities are concerned. We must be living in the time of the end when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." This is a time when universities, schools, and the printed page are available to all. The Bible, once little known, is now open in over a thousand languages, giving a knowledge of God's Word to almost the entire world.

Will there be a great "peace and safety" cry on earth?

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:24

Note: This is what the nations say, what the people say: "We will have peace, we will beat our swords into plowshares." This same prediction is made by the prophet Micah (4:2,3). He credits the saying

to "many nations." Never have there been so many peace movements as in the past generation. First, we had the League of Nations, then the Kellogg Peace Pact, in which the nations solemnly declared that they would outlaw war forever. Sixty-one nations signed it. Herbert Hoover, then president of the United States, declared: "We are at the beginning of the golden age." Now we have the United Nations. Billions of dollars are spent for world betterment, peace, and prosperity; but God, through His prophets, has indicated that this peace movement will be short-lived. "For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." "We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!" Jeremiah 8:11,15.

What did the Apostle Paul say about this?

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, . . . and they shall not escape." 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3. Our great peace movement is popular; and well-meaning, earnest people promote peace.

But what will be the actual state of things in the world?

"Proclaim you this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up; beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all you heathen, and gather yourselves together round about thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put you in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: ... for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." Joel 3:9-13.

Note: We have a paradox here-the people saying, peace and safety; we will learn war no more; we will beat our swords into plowshares," but they do not do as they say. As Alexandre Millerand, ex-president of France, once said, "We are marching to war behind the banner of peace."

World War I cost the United States alone thirty billion dollars. It seemed a staggering sum. Some predicted that the nation would go bankrupt. But the Second World War cost our nation ten times as much-300 billion dollars, the cost of that war to one nation alone, and in money alone.

And now atomic and thermonuclear weapons bring fear to most of the human race. No wonder Jesus spoke of "fearful sights and great signs" that would be seen in the earth just before His coming. (Luke 21:11) Some suggest that the people of this day will become human moles and live underground for safety. Other say that there is no use doing anything, for there can be no escape millions will be swept away in one day.

When Jesus foretold these signs of His coming, how did He console His disciples?

"You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled." Matthew 24:6

Will there be a great departure from true Christian faith in the latter days?

The answer is 1 Timothy 4: 1: "Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."

Will there be trouble in the industrial world in the latter times?

Read carefully James 5:1-6.

What kind of times will come just before our Lord returns?

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." 2 Timothy 3:1.

Why will these times be perilous?

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:2-5. In the last days these nineteen sins will be prevalent among those who have a form of godliness but deny its power. As a result the last warning message of God will be unheeded by those here described, and the day of God will come upon them unawares. In what class are you?

What did the Apostle Peter say about his preaching on the coming of Christ?

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." 2 Peter 1: 16-18.

Note: The apostle is referring to the experience of himself and James and John on the mount of transfiguration. There they saw an enacted prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ in glory. There was the cloud of glory, there was Christ transfigured, shining like the sun; there was the voice of God, there was Moses representing the resurrected saints, there was Elijah representing the saints who will be translated at Christ's return. The whole thing was a prophetic moving picture of Christ's glorious return. The three apostles were eyewitnesses of this, and when they proclaimed the Second Coming of Christ, they could describe it because they had seen it in miniature.

To what safe guide does the Apostle Peter refer us on this subject?

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1: 19.

Note: God's Word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths. (Psalm 119:105.) The prophecies light up the future. Only God knows the future. He alone can see the end from the beginning. (Isaiah 46:9, 10.) Prophecy is really history in advance, and all the prophecies of Scripture point to one great event, the coming of Christ. Those ignorant of these divine prophecies are without the light; they do not know that the end is near, and will be overtaken as by a thief.